OUR COLCHESTER

A BID to make new history

COLCHESTER LEISURE RECOVERY STRATEGIC PLAN

SIX TILL SIX

MAY 2022

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1. INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

Colchester town centre's leisure recovery strategy is based on research with the community including residents, visitors, students, businesses, public bodies, charities, the voluntary sector and other valued stakeholders.

The plan includes core strategies, objectives, actions and progress indicators. The document is available for all partners to adopt, to enable them to work together to support the recovery of the town's leisure sector over the next 5-10 years.

The plan aims to achieve the following:

- Support the town's strategic priorities
- Advance the town's vision, mission and values
- Strengthen the town's position as a leading leisure destination in the east and south east
- Establish measurable progress indicators and timelines
- Identify best practice, drawing inspiration from local, national and global locations
- Is adaptable and flexible in order to adapt according to changing needs
- Promote partnership working and recognise the value of collaboration

For the purposes of this strategy, the terms 'leisure' and 'leisure sector' are used to describe the broader leisure, hospitality, evening and night time economy businesses.

FOREWORD

The leisure industry generates nearly £200 billion in revenue yearly in the UK. With the global pandemic, local and national lockdowns, and changing restrictions due to Covid-19 guidance, the leisure industry has been hard struck with a turbulent 24 months.

Not only have business owners and managers within the sector had to deal with changing guidelines and adapting their everyday procedures to remain open, but these leisure businesses have also lost millions in the process. The leisure sector brings a wealth of value to Colchester; encompassing hospitality, leisure, and arts and culture, the sector holds many invaluable businesses within our town centre.

Our Colchester BID provides business support for all sectors within the town centre and commissioned this strategy to help aid the leisure sector's recovery as one of the hardest hit throughout the pandemic. Whilst the strategy is BID commissioned, it is openly available to all local authorities, stakeholders, and businesses to adopt within their operations. We believe that working as a community to bring this strategy to action will create effective and beneficial results to help the leisure sector to recover and thrive, in turn supporting our town centre to do the same

Simon Blaxill
Chair, Our Colchester BID

PARTNERS

This strategic plan was developed in partnership with the following organisations:

- Colchester Borough Council
- University of Essex
- Mercury Theatre
- Essex Police
- Will Quince MP
- Colchester Pubwatch
- Essex County Council
- Colchester Garrison
- Street Pastors
- Colchester Amphora
- Open Road/SOS Bus

Thank you for your support of this important project.

VISION

In supporting the leisure sector in Colchester to recover, our vision is to:

• **Revive** people's confidence and enthusiasm to spend their leisure time in Colchester

• **Strive** to be a destination in which leisure businesses are supported to succeed and grow, providing attractive career opportunities

• **Thrive** to be an unforgettable leisure destination in the region for visitors, workers and residents

CORE FOCUS AREAS

1. Championing the sector and removing barriers

2. Vibrant, safe, accessible & sustainable

3. Working together

2. STRATEGIC FOUNDATION
CORE STRATEGIES

STRATEGY 1: CHAMPIONING AND SUPPORTING THE SECTOR

We will build confidence and resilience in Colchester's leisure sector, reducing or removing barriers to growth, innovation and recovery.

OBJECTIVE 1A

Ensure the leisure sector is considered within wider strategic decisions, plans and developments for Colchester town centre.

Actions
- Ensure that resources are identified so that actions within this strategy are progressed and secure commitment of partners
- Set out and communicate the strategic vision for the town centre as a partnership and ensure the leisure sector is clearly considered within this
- Set up a representative NTE Strategy Board as a subgroup of Leisure Recovery Board, chaired by a statutory partner,
- Consider whether a specific leisure or evening and night time economy (ENTE) strategy should be established
- Review and plan for the changing mix, usage and audiences

Case Study
- Paris Night Owl Committee (Page 74)
    - A committee of 30 randomly selected citizens that sits under the broader 'Paris Night Council'. This committee is the steering group for the Mayor's night time vision, initiating and piloting projects and consulting on new policies and actions.

OBJECTIVE 1B

Provide sector-specific, tailored support for the town's leisure businesses to recover, adapt, grow and build resilience.

Actions
- Develop a forum model for the leisure sector, through which issues and concerns could be identified and raised with the appropriate parties
- Consider offering centralised support services e.g. retaining a local licensing specialist to support existing businesses with queries but also to support independent operators looking to open a premises in the town
- Conduct a regular business confidence survey for the leisure sector to regularly monitor sentiment
- Consider how barriers to growth and investment could be reduced or removed, and how essential functions could be enhanced to better support recovery, e.g. licensing, planning
- Consider a local business to business mentoring scheme to share expertise and provide business and mental health support

Case Studies
- The Drinks Trust Charity and The Licensed Trade Charity
  - Charities that offer a variety of support for those who work in the licensed trade. They provide individuals with services including vocational, well-being, financial and practical support. These services are intended to assist with and improve the circumstances of those who receive them.

OBJECTIVE 1C

Ensure that the value of the leisure economy in Colchester is recognised and celebrated.

Actions
- Establish and promote the positive economic, employment and social impacts of the leisure sector on the town
- Ensure leisure is integrated in all promotional opportunities for the town i.e. marketing campaigns, websites

Case Studies:
- NTIA Ambassador of the Night Awards
  - Industry body the NTIA runs the Ambassador of the Night Awards annually, this awards night recognises the work that people have done in the industry.
- BBN Regional and National Awards
  - Best Bar None runs and annual awards ceremony that awards regions and premises going above and beyond in terms of safety and operation.
- Independent Birmingham
  - Company based in Birmingham that collates and promotes independent venues in and around the city. Venues sign up and get promoted in return for offering paid Independent Birmingham members discounts etc.

OBJECTIVE 1D

Help to address the staff shortages in the sector through presenting hospitality and leisure as an attractive career path.

Actions
- Engage with national campaigns to promote hospitality and leisure as a positive career choice
- Develop initiatives to support ongoing staffing shortages using local partners, government schemes and other opportunities
- Identify funding to progress an innovative digital solution to join up learning, skills, vocational and mentoring opportunities
- Review policies and best practice developed in other locations and consider adopting locally
- Review the government's Hospitality Strategy and consider how its aims can be supported locally

Case Studies:
- Choose Hospitality and Hospitality Rising
    - National recruitment campaigns to support staff into industry. Aligning messaging with these campaigns or using their already establish materials could help encourage people in Colchester into the industry
- Manchester Fair Pay Policy
    - (In progress) Would see all hospitality & leisure staff paid National Living Wage. This would make the industry more sustainable and attractive to prospective staff
- Hospitality Employers Charter (Northern Ireland)
    - Charter that hospitality businesses sign up to, focuses on supporting & developing their staff; improving employee satisfaction and addressing staff shortage
- Hospitality Skills Buffet (Horsham District Council)
    - Rolled out free training programme on hospitality skills and licensing and regulation information to address skills and staff shortages

STRATEGY 2: VIBRANT, SAFE & ACCESSIBLE

We will identify and address factors that affect customer's choice of
 leisure destination. We will ensure that changes and developments in the
town and its environs are considered with the leisure sector in mind, to
maximise opportunities and reduce potential negative impacts.

OBJECTIVE 2A

Understand the negative perception created by vacant units in the town centre and employ a strategic approach to reducing this.

Actions
- Enhance the BID's vacant unit vision, including additional metrics to measure vacancy rates
- Identify creative and desirable meanwhile and longer-term solutions for vacant units that support the town centre's recovery
- Promote proactive work and any positive news regarding the vacant unit position

Case Studies:
- Barking Rd Shopfront Installations (Page 130)
    - *Public realm*: High street frontages had light installations installed. These frontages were illuminated during the night to highlight their existence to consumers and showed them the amenities that were available to them
- Telford and Wrekin
    - *Grant scheme*: Grant scheme that supported people, including students, to set up businesses in vacant premises; grant had other aspects e.g. facade improvements.
- Kent
    - *Operational adaptations*: Full scale operational change including training of officers to better manage empty units and there knowledge around available funds.
- Isle of Wight, Cheshire East, Hypha Studios
    - *Meanwhile use*: Variety of approaches to meanwhile use of vacant units, these approaches must sit alongside longer term approaches to vacant units.
- Stockton on Tees
    - *Business start up hub*: Using large vacant unit as a hub for start up businesses to set up pop up stores to test operation before expanding to more permanent set up in other vacant premises in city centre.
- Sheffield
    - *Technology hub and mixed use*: Large vacant unit converted into mixed use premises that includes leisure premises and technology hub for students and businesses.

OBJECTIVE 2B

Reduce the impact on the town centre of issues related to individuals with a street-based lifestyle.

Actions
- Research the approaches taken in other towns and cities, replicating appropriate elements in Colchester
- Review policies that affect decision making around this issue

Case Studies:
- Cardiff, Winchester, Manchester, Norwich
  - *Alternative/diverted giving strategies*: These are strategies that encourage and enable people to donate to homeless individuals indirectly, the funds are then distributed by the council/organisation to support these individuals. Discourages begging whilst still allowing people to financially support homeless individuals.
- Derby, Liverpool, Leicester
  - *Comprehensive strategies*: A variety of approaches that are comprehensive in their implementation, including actions such as regular surveys of the number of homeless individuals and inviting former homeless people to sit on strategy boards.
- Only a pavement away and Out of Home Campaign
  - *Charity approaches*: Only a Pavement Away support homeless people into work in the hospitality industry. The Out of Home Campaign (Stockholm) saw the city's electronic billboards etc. display information about how people could support shelters; when the temperature dropped below a certain point however, this info would change to directions to the nearest shelter.
- More case studies here

OBJECTIVE 2C

Provide greater reassurance that issues impacting on the safety and vibrancy of the town are being dealt with promptly and efficiently by improving the reporting and feedback process for non-emergency issues experienced by businesses in the town.

Actions
- Review whether the BCRP function could be brought within the BID to make best use of resource and become a conduit for non emergency issues
- Create new dedicated post within Our Colchester BID directly for the purposes of delivering BCRP and crime reduction interventions

Case Studies:
- Pubwatch
  - Obviously there is already a scheme set up in Colchester, but it's importance and usefulness should be noted. Pubwatches offer a great forum for discussion and progress of strategies and best practice. Partnership approaches are vital to achieving strategic goals, and the Pubwatch can be the partnership that enables this. Reading Pubwatch is a great example of best practice in this area.
- BID Managed BCRP
  - The British BID's 2020 National BID Criteria highlighted that many national levy payers expect BID's to engage with or manage a BCRP as a condition of ballot support. This is something that Brilliant Brighton BID do, working closely and in partnership with the very successful Brighton BCRP.

OBJECTIVE 2D

Ensure that all visitors to Colchester in the evening and at night are able to relax and enjoy their experience in the town, feeling that it is a safe and well managed place to visit.

Actions

- Engage the support of all partners to improve safety and perception of safety after dark
- Explore training and/or accreditation opportunities to improve safety at night
- Review physical elements of the town centre to ensure they support a feeling of safety at night
- Identify best practice initiatives locally, nationally and internationally to benefit from successful innovations trialled in other towns and cities

Case Studies:

- Clapham Night Hub
  - The BID funded a night hub that anyone could access if they needed support. Hub was staffed with street angels, paramedics, police and BID staff and was open to anyone not just revellers.
- Walk Smart and Sydney Laneways (Australia)
  - Use of light etc. to make key routes and alleys safer. Walk Smart also saw increased police presence on the routes found to be most popular at night.
- Gloucester Police
  - Strategy re. incidents and reports of spiking. Modelled after Plymouth's successful approach, increased numbers of testing kits in venues and police also carry urine testing kits in patrol cars
- Vulnerability training and Ask for Angela
  - Training and schemes set up to support staff's ability to help vulnerable people.
- Women's Night Safety Charter
  - London's charter to promote women's safety. Organisations sign up to commit to the safety principles of the charter to make London a safer place.

OBJECTIVE 2E

Ensure availability of a safe and pleasant parking provision for customers and staff at all times of day, with clear and well communicated pricing.

Actions
- Assess the suitability of the current provision vs customer needs
- Consider the complete parking journey for visitors
- Promote initiatives to reduce cost and increase appeal of parking offer
- Review best practice initiatives identified from other towns/cities and consider whether any are appropriate for Colchester

Case Studies:
- North Kesteven District Council
    - People, Places and Parking process was implemented to ensure that parking suited the needs of users.
- Colchester (2008) & Technological University, Graz, Austria (Page 24)
    - Review into parking provision and demand. In Colchester it was found that the pay system was disjointed and did not meet expectations of users so this was changed. The TU Graz found that their parking provision was a key cause of congestion so implemented measures that reduced supply of parking and encouraged people to take alternative transport such as subsidised bus fares etc.
- MoLo (Page 35)
    - Discount parking scheme where premises sign up and reimburse parts of people's parking if they spend money with them e.g. if someone spends £10 in store they get 50p off parking.
- Park Mark
    - Safe parking scheme where car parks become accredited for being quality and safe.
- Nottingham
    - Workplace Parking Levy - businesses are charged a levy (with exemptions) if they provide parking spaces for staff in city centre. Levy money is used to improve transport infrastructure and it encourages businesses to support staff to use alternative transport.

OBJECTIVE 2F

Ensure visitors to Colchester can easily access the town centre, whichever mode of transport and time of day they choose to visit.

Actions
- Identify the key access challenges by road and ensure the leisure sector's interests are considered in decisions made about highways
- Review the suitability of public transport options for all times of day and throughout the week

Case Studies:
All below case studies can be found here:
- Brighton & Reading
  - *Investment in bus infrastructure*: Years if investment into good bus networks to ease strain of congestion from parking.
- West Midlands
  - *Use of data and low emission zones*: Using data to analyse busy routes in order to minimise congestion. There is also a low emission zone in the centre now that discourages people from driving into the centre with an £8 daily charge.
- Oxfordshire
  - *Real time updates on congestion*: Partnership with Waze to better provide users with real time traffic to ease levels of congestion in the region
- Bristol
  - *Investment in cycling infrastructure*: Years of investing in good cycling infrastructure to encourage people to use bikes instead of other modes of transport.
- York
  - *Park and Ride*: One of the UK's most established and successful Park and Ride Schemes that connects out of town shopping to the city centre.
- Leicester
  - Arriva run two innovative schemes - a tap on and tap off scheme that works in a similar way to the Tube in London, customers simply tap their card at the start and the end of their journey and they are charged accordingly. They also run a scheme called ArrivaClick that allows customers to use the bus in a similar vain to a taxi or Uber.

STRATEGY 3: WORKING TOGETHER

We will foster positive and productive partnerships between businesses and other stakeholders to further our common goals.

OBJECTIVE 3A

Identify opportunities for the leisure sector presented by the town's culture and heritage sectors, and the recent cultural strategy that has been developed for Colchester.

Actions
- Identify commercial and other opportunities for the leisure sector linked to the outcomes of the cultural strategy, develop effective mechanisms to facilitate these, and promote to leisure businesses

Case Studies:
- Amplify Parramatta
  - Diversification grants for businesses to set up as a music venue out of normal business hours. This addressed the shortage of music venues in the city.
- York
  - Ambitious cultural strategy including aims to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site by 2025
- Culture Liverpool
  - Started in 2008 by the Director of Culture for Liverpool, this organisation seeks to ensure that culture is at the heart of the future of Liverpool's strategies and projects. They have just published their cultural strategy to 2030.

OBJECTIVE 3B

Develop a closer link with the University of Essex and the Colchester Institute to welcome and support students and ensure their safety and welfare.

Actions
- Identify opportunities to promote Colchester to existing and potential students, providing additional reasons for students to choose the University of Essex and Colchester Institute and ensuring the town fully benefits from and connects with its student population
- Establish a joint welfare initiative between the BID and University

Case Studies:
- National Express West Midlands
  - £1 city centre single fares for students at all times
- University of Nottingham
  - Off campus affairs team that liaises between students and the communities they live in
- Kings College London
  - A small group of final year business students take part in the business consultancy initiative. This initiative sees the students work with local small businesses, using their studies and knowledge to provide analysis and recommendations to the business over the course of a month.
- Civic University Agreement
  - This is an agreement amongst 30 UK universities to act as civic universities. A civic university is a university that acknowledges and promotes its role to support the communities they are based in.

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